

Academy of Saints Peter and Paul: An Integrative Marketing Strategy

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To help the Academy achieve its enrollment goals, I designed an Integrative Marketing Strategy with five key components: a “New Family” Folder to hold information for prospective families, a new school brochure, postcards to promote annual January Open House, a new parish and school website, and a redesigned parish newsletter.

The Marketing Task Force, a branch of the school’s Educational Advisory Committee, was instrumental in the composition and implementation of the IMS, as well as other components in their overall marketing plan for the 2008-2009 school year. During the course of this project, many parishioners and other members of the community stepped forward and offered considerable resources towards the completion each component. No single component could have been completed without their assistance. However, “free” is never free. Organizations must be specific with internal and external donors regarding exactly what resources are needed, and when. You will not receive what you do not ask for.

Since the inception of this marketing plan (June of 2008) the Academy has increased its enrollment from 74 students to 109 students.

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My chosen school improvement project was an Integrative Marketing Strategy for the Academy Saints Peter and Paul (church and school). This included writing a comprehensive Marketing Strategy for 2008-2009 (Appendix A) and the inclusion of several major projects within the strategy:

- Design an attractive “New Family Folder” to keep all information for prospective families in one organized location (and ready to mail)
- Design a new brochure for the school
- Design new postcards to promote annual Open House
- Complete redesign of school/church website, including richer content and more organized layout
- Restructure quarterly Parish Newsletter to have an alumni focus and solicit donations from alumni

Printed Design Work

A company called DPD (Data Print Distribution) handled the design and printing for the folder, brochures, and postcards. The president of the company is a parishioner at Saints Peter and Paul; therefore, a significant amount of the labor and printing was free of charge. As a small Catholic school during lean economic times, we rely heavily on parishioners donating funds, time, and labor, and none of this work would have been possible if not for DPD.

The folder design took about three weeks, with printing and delivery taking one week. The folders were delivered to the school in October. We paid for the folders (which were printed off-site of DPD) at cost.

The brochure design took considerably longer, but with good reason. I met with a designer at DPD in September regarding the folder and brochure. I gave the designer a few examples of brochures from other area schools that I liked. (After the folder was completed) I was asked to submit the text for the brochure content. Once the text was in place, pictures were chosen. I continued to be dissatisfied with the design, but was not sure how to convey this to people who were doing the work for free. I finally realized that I needed to be much more specific about exactly what I wanted; once I did this, the brochure progressed to a point where I felt much more satisfied with what I was seeing. All design and print work for the brochure were pro bono.

As DPD designed and printed the postcards for last year's Open House, the work for the redesign was extremely quick. I submitted a new picture, changed dates and wording, and went through three proofs. Unfortunately, the postcards were mailed later than I wanted, and were delivered only days before our Open House. We will do a better job of planning for next January to ensure they are delivered at least one week fore the Open House.

The Website

The website was, by far, the most difficult and time intensive facet of the project. I spent much of the summer pushing the Parish Business Administrator and her son, who is the IT Coordinator, to take a look at the organization of the old website and see if it could be improved and redesigned. After three wrangling, we were able to convince the PBA that we needed outside help for the website. She arranged a meeting with the company that designed the original website seven years ago. The meeting was held in late September of 2008. Aaron, the VP of the new company stated that what I wanted done was easy and should take no more than a few weeks. (Enter the "Money Pit".)

Two weeks passed and I heard nothing, so I began my email regimen with Aaron. He stated that he had sent the quote for the work to the PBA and had not heard a response from her. I questioned her and she said she had not received it from him. I emailed him back and asked him to resend it and copy it to me. A week later I still had nothing. I asked the PBA again and she said she had received it. I emailed Aaron and asked if work would begin now that the quote was approved. He stated that it would begin, but the work would take longer than originally stated because he was very busy and doing most of the work for free.

Six weeks and countless emails later, and I still had seen nothing from the web designer. I had asked for the design template to be done by November 4th so that I could show the Educational Advisory Committee (the Catholic version of a School Board). I emailed and called several times that day and still heard nothing. I told Father and the PBA that if I did not hear something by Monday that I would fire Aaron's company and look elsewhere. I was told on Monday by Aaron that I should see the template by the following Friday. Friday came and went and still nothing.

On the third Friday, I finally received an email with a link to the new site template. This was the new design for the site, sans any content as we would be required to upload everything ourselves. The design looked well enough, but none of the page organization was set (I had emailed an organization chart for page titles and locations eight weeks prior). I emailed stating that the design looked pretty good but needed some minor changes, and said that I was confused about the organization not being done, and worried that so much time had already passed. I was told by Aaron via email that he was doing much of the work for free (the "retail" value of his work was \$3000 but he was only charging us \$500) and therefore did not have the right to demand that things be done in a timely fashion.

I emailed and insisted that the IT Coordinator, Father, and I go to their offices to receive training on how to upload content to the new website and discuss what changes needed to be made to the new template. A completely new contact, Travis, emailed me back to say that we could do the training on Wednesday (the day before Thanksgiving). Finally! The three of us went and Travis was very helpful. I spent the weekend uploading content onto the school pages. I would estimate that I spent about 60 hours over the next two weeks uploading documents, pictures, and formatting the pages.

I managed to reveal the new site to the EAC at the December 4th meeting with 90% of the school content complete, and the site went live the following Wednesday. As the remaining months of the school year progressed, I made the effort to update the site at least weekly- particularly the Current Events page. The parish side still contains “under construction” signs.

The Newsletter

The fifth item, restructuring the parish newsletter, was met with several obstacles. While this is supposed to be a quarterly newsletter, it has not been published since March 2008, with very little explanation. The design and layout of the publication was also cluttered with multiple fonts and childish clip-art. In short, it did not look professional, and the committees involved agreed that a change needed to be made. In February, the marketing task force and the EAC reviewed several alternate templates for the newsletter. A final version was selected and submitted to the IT coordinator for the upcoming issue that was set to be mailed March 31.

Initially, the IT Coordinator balked at using the template because it was in Microsoft Publisher; a format he preferred not to use. After several attempts at recreating the template in his preferred software, a spring edition of the newsletter was finalized. However, by April 30 the newsletter still had not been sent to the printer. There is still no alumni component. It is my hope that an alumni coordinator will be named in the fall of 2009, and that this person will be able to work with the IT Coordinator to improve the current state of the parish newsletter.

Conclusion: Highs and Lows

So, what have I learned, and what has been helpful? Getting things for free or very low cost has been helpful. What has been an obstacle? The exact same thing. Apparently work that is done for free (or very little money) means that you can't really get you want or need in a timely fashion- at least not from most people- and if you complain then you are ungrateful and annoying.

What else has been helpful? Having a specific plan and timeline for when work needed to be done- even if the timeline was extended by 8-10 weeks. With many different projects going at the same

time, it was beneficial to know the absolute latest something could get done, then tell someone it had to be done 2-6 weeks before that, to be absolutely sure things were ready. As I stated before, DPD has done tremendous work, and everything has been done when they said it would- unless more revisions needed to be made. Revisions were then made in a timely manner. The website was another story entirely- almost the complete opposite of my experience with DPD.

The obstacles that I continue to encounter are the opposing forces within the parish who do not like change. I am constantly amazed at how people seem to set themselves up to purposely slow things down or make things difficult for personal reasons rather than getting work done for the parish and school, for the families that we serve. It is a daily struggle that extends far beyond the integrative marketing project.